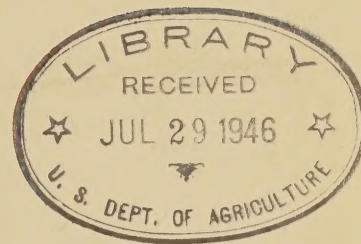


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RURAL LIFE TRENDS PROJECT

Bent County, Colorado

- A. Shifts in Farm Manpower Patterns
- B. Shifts in Medical Facilities and Practices

Report No. 1  
October 1942



BENT COUNTY, COLORADO

A. Shifts in Farm Manpower Patterns

Resume

People said labor, tires, and repairs were major problems.

They feel that the tire shortage may be phoney and that they must have tires. They are not reducing speed or making much effort to conserve tires.

They have let much work not especially vital go undone.

They believe labor shortage/<sup>is</sup> due to proximity of government construction projects and that when they are completed the labor problem may be relieved. They do not believe local workers will leave.

Many say they will reduce acreage next year and believe there will be a shortage of tenants. Some believe land will be idle, others that low labor requirement crops will be raised and livestock reduced.

Young boys are being used extensively. They are paid 35 cents to 40 cents an hour but people maintain they cannot take time to train boys for farm work.

Some farm women are helping in farm work but most people insist that "white" women are not strong enough to be used on the farm. "It's an Easterner's idea that looks good on paper."

Some believe that Japanese can be used for farm labor.

Rumors about resident Japanese have been started.

Many farmers say that labor is less serious than machinery and repair shortages. Farmers are beginning to hoard machinery by refusing custom work because they do not want to wear their machinery out. Pooling machinery, many believe, is not practical.

People have an exceptionally friendly attitude toward USES.

With machinery and livestock selling at high prices, many older men claim they are considering selling out.





## BENT COUNTY, COLORADO

Bent County, Colorado is located in the Arkansas Valley. Approximately 583,132 acres are in farms of which 60,608 acres are irrigated. Ordinarily the water supply is adequate although it was rather short during the thirties. The county has been over-irrigated and several projects which were started during abnormally moist years have been abandoned.

The agriculture of the irrigated lands is of the general diversified livestock type with sugar beets and onions providing a cash crop. Alfalfa hay is important with farmers recommending that from one-fourth to one-half the unit be in that crop. Most of the hay produced is used locally but a substantial percentage is shipped out or sold to the cattle men of the dry land area. There are two alfalfa mills.

The dry land area is predominantly range land with the cultivated portions planted to wheat and barley. Each year some corn is also planted on the dry land even though it is a highly hazardous crop.

There were 1,687 farms in the county in 1939. Four hundred seventy-seven, a little more than two-thirds, of them had some irrigated land. Two hundred and ten were entirely dry land units. During the dry years of the thirties, there was a marked tendency toward consolidation of farms into larger units. From 1929 to 1939, the number of farms was reduced by more than 22 percent, from 882 to 687. The average size of unit has increased from 613 in 1929 to 848 in 1939.

The number of farms was actually increasing and size of farms decreasing up until 1935. Thus the process of consolidation actually took place during the last four years of the decade.

	<u>1920</u>	<u>1925</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1940</u>
Number farms	1,056	900	882	899	687
Average size farms	411	677	613	538	848
Number dry land farms	618		364		371
Acres irrigated	128,712		64,338		60,608
Number irrigated farms	438		518		477
Average size irrigated farms			285		646

The consolidation has been going on in irrigated as well as dry land farms. The number of irrigated farms decreased over 7 percent, from 518 in 1930 to 477 in 1940.

The total population of Bent County was 9,653 in 1940, representing a growth of 529 since 1930. The urban population, that of Las Animas, the county seat, grew by 615 in the last decade. The rural nonfarm population increased by 590 in the same period. The farm population, however, decreased by 786.





Of the 9,653 population, 7,103 were 14 years of age or over. Of these, 3,112 (43 percent) were in the labor force. Two thousand six hundred and fifteen, or 84 percent, were males. In 1940, 501, or 16 percent, were unemployed or employed on emergency work.

Of those, 3,991 not in the labor force, the greatest number (1,962) were women engaged in their own home work. Three hundred and thirty males and 288 females were in school; 256 males and 102 females were unable to work; 701 were in institutions; 161 males and 172 females were unreported.

The agricultural workers consisted of 1,607 persons with all but 32 being males. Five hundred and ninety-two were farmers and farm managers.<sup>1/</sup> Seventy-one were unpaid family workers and 934 were farm laborers.

Of the 687 farms, 203 (29.5 percent) were operated by full owners, 108 (15.4 percent) were operated by part-owners, and 376 (55.1 percent) by full tenants. During the past twenty years tenancy has increased from 22 percent in 1920 to 43.5 percent in 1930 to 55.1 percent in 1940.

Tenure	1920		1930		1940	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Full owners	640	60.0	328	37.0	203	29.5
Part owners	173	16.0	173	20.0	108	15.4
Tenants	231	22.0	374	43.5	376	55.1
Managers	12		7			

Six hundred and seventy-nine of the farms reported their gross income for 1940. They are distributed as follows:

	Number	Percent
Under \$250	125 <sup>2/</sup>	19.4+
250 - 399	60	9.1+
400 - 599	45	7.0+
600 - 999	81	12.5
1000 - 1499	80	12.4+
1500 - 2499	104	16.2-
2500 - 3999	60	9.1+
4000 - 5999	39	6.0+
6000 - 9999	27	4.2+
10,000 & over	21	3.2+
TOTAL	642 <sup>3/</sup>	

<sup>1/</sup> This is 95 less than the number of farms. The discrepancy is due to a number of operators who have another occupation reported (37 reported no products either sold or used) and to nonresident operators.

<sup>2/</sup> There were 162 farms reporting income under \$250 but 37 reported no income from produce sold, traded, or used. They are probably urban or rural nonfarm families whose income is derived from nonfarm activities but live on pieces of land over 3 acres which they do not cultivate.

<sup>3/</sup> This total differs by 37 from number of farms used elsewhere. Those not reporting farm income were not included here. 642 is used to derive percent.





Of the 125 with gross incomes under \$250, a goodly number were farm laborers whose major income came from their labor. Two hundred and twenty-six operators reported working off the farm. The average days worked off the farm was 124. Eighty-two operators reported working an average of 53 days on other farms. One hundred and fifty-seven reported working an average of 151 days at nonfarm work.

Two hundred and seventy-seven farms reported hiring labor during 1939. One hundred and fifty hired labor by the month, 154 by day or week, and 117 by piece work or contract.

The major source of income was from livestock for 109 farms; dairy products for 19; poultry and poultry products for 52; other livestock products for 3; field crops for 289; vegetables for 10; horticultural products for 1; forest products for 2 (?); and products used by the household for 157.

The size of farms is shown below:

<u>Size</u>	<u>1940</u>		<u>1935</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Under 10	42		18	
10 - 29	30		25	
30 - 49	27		24	
50 - 69	20		22	
70 - 99	60		69	
100 - 139	35		51	
140 - 179	165		175	
180 - 219	25		35	
220 - 259	35		39	
260 - 379	67		186	
380 - 499	44		58	
500 - 699	37		68	
700 - 999	24		42	
Over 1000	76		87	



The following is a picture of the crops and livestock produced:

Crop	1940		1935		1930	
	Reporting	Acres	Reporting	Acres	Reporting	Acres
Corn	222	2,799	250	4,687	682	27,227
For grain	186	2,249	89	1,360		
Silage	10	130				
Grass	36	420				
Sorghums	366	11,173	24	2,766	276	12,620
Grain	245	5,461	24	345		
Barley	270	4,946	256	4,148		
Wheat	268	4,772	212	3,982	180	5,030
Hay	411	22,409		24,658	667	27,620
Alfalfa	407	22,099	457	23,724		
Sugar Beets	140	2,673	156	2,891		
Melons	35	1,190				
Onions	11	62				
Beans	10	101		28	236	





### The Survey

Somewhat less than a week was spent in the county (August 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31). Immediately upon arrival, the writer went to the farm home of a friend and gained a general picture of the community and a preliminary idea of the problems. The County Agricultural Agent, County FSA Supervisor, Chairman of the War Board, and the County Representative of the UMW were interviewed. A meeting called by the War Board to discuss truck transportation was attended. A community sale held on Saturday was also attended, during which the writer listened to conversations and talked to several local farmers. In addition to this, farmers were interviewed in their homes and in the village. A number of local boys of working age were also interviewed.

The predominant problem in the county is that of labor. This is a problem of urban as well as farm people. It soon became evident that farm labor could not be considered apart from other types of labor. Everyone with whom the problems of the county's participation in the war effort was discussed voluntarily mentioned labor problems early in the conversation.

The problem second only to labor is tires for truck transportation. But, the general attitudes of the community toward these two problems are markedly different.

The problem of labor is considered immediate, the immediate labor supply is believed to be distressingly short and everyone has a great fear of a still greater shortage. This fear verges on hysteria and may be the major motivating factor in planning next year's farm operations. It is already affecting farm practices.

The problem of tires is considered immediately a nuisance, but one which will be solved sufficiently soon so that it will not be a serious problem in the future. While everyone is very pessimistic about the labor problem, most are optimistic about tires. The attitudes of the people concerning these two problems will be discussed separately.

In general, the farm work is well in hand but throughout the year there has been a pressure on the labor supply. To date, the problem has been met by the more economical use of labor on strictly essential work. Jobs that used to be done have been let slip. For instance, about half of the farmers interviewed have omitted the second hoeing of their beets and some of the corn has had one less operation than usual. Roadside which have been mowed previously have been allowed to go. As a result, while the fields are in fairly good condition from the point of view of probable crop yields, they, with the whole countryside, have a ragged appearance. All those interviewed, with a very few exceptions, admit that the labor shortage has not resulted in any crop loss. "But", they almost all add, "Unless there is an unusually late fall, many beets will be frozen in the ground".

The primary cause of the labor shortage in their minds is the pecuniary of Government construction projects. There are four of these projects, the





Caddoa Dam, the La Junta Air Base, a Veterans' Hospital, and the Japanese Evacuation Center at Granada. No evidence could be found that the last actually drew labor out of Bent County, but the people all consider it a part of the competition for local labor.

The first two actually have drained labor from Bent County agriculture. The writer asked eleven young men on the streets of Las Animas if there was "any work around here". All of them immediately told of the opportunities at La Junta Air Base and the Veterans' Hospital and the Caddoa Dam. Not one voluntarily mentioned farm work, and when asked about that kind of work showed little interest or knowledge. Four local business men responded in the same way (1 restaurant proprietor, 2 filling station attendants, and 1 barber).

While in the county, three families--1 from Oklahoma, 1 from Arkansas, and 1 from Pennsylvania--arrived in the county and inquired for farm work. All of them, however, later took employment at one of the construction jobs. On Sunday, the writer accompanied one farmer to interview the one from Pennsylvania. He had been employed temporarily the previous Saturday by a farmer who reported him to his friend who was looking for a year-round hired man. It is significant that while the first one needed labor badly, he offered to release him to his friend who could give steady employment. Upon arrival, the laborer was gone but soon returned. When asked if interested in a position on a farm, he replied that he had been but had just returned from the Caddoa Dam where he had secured work at the rate of \$70 per week and would start Monday. He had worked on a farm for one-half day.

In the irrigated area, there has always been a great need for year-round help. Eighty acres is about all one man can handle alone. Most of the larger units have housing facilities for a labor family. This type of help has become very scarce. Wages now paid are about \$75 per month, plus a house and other perquisites.

Many of the year-round hired men have left for construction work. The wages there are 62 cents an hour minimum for common labor with opportunity to work overtime at a higher rate. Most of the good farm laborers do not stay at the low rate for long. The skills they have acquired on the farm fit them for semi-skilled and skilled jobs which pay up to \$1.25 an hour.

Some of the farmers in an attempt to hold their help permit them to work at the construction jobs during slack seasons. Several interviewed mentioned that and said that their own work has been slighted as a result. Frequently, the man do not come back to farm work, but the farmers say that is a chance they must run. If they didn't let them get a chance at the "big money" that way, they would be sure to lose them entirely.

Even the Mexicans who have formerly worked only in the beet fields have no difficulty in getting construction jobs.





Small operators themselves are taking construction jobs and many of them have grown children who are working on construction projects and who must be replaced by hired help.

All the farmers interviewed say that they cannot compete with wages paid by Government projects. But, most of them add that they think \$75 per month and perquisites is really as good real wages as defense projects. "But", they say, "it's hard to convince people of that".

Most of the farmers expressed the opinion that when the construction projects were completed (The Caddoa Dam should be completed by January 1), the local labor situation will be relieved. When asked if they did not think many of the laborers would leave for other defense projects farther away, they said that they believed most of the local people would remain in the county.

The beets have now been cultivated and two cuttings of alfalfa have been put up. Both of these activities have been accomplished with a smaller hired labor force than usual. It was accomplished by extending the period, longer working hours for the operator and farm family, and by more labor by older operators who had previously depended more on hired labor.

The extended season for thinning and hoeing beets presented a serious problem. Both beets and weeds grow so large that it increased the time required to thin and hoe an acre, thus reducing the earning capacity of the laborers. The regular Mexican best workers refused to work in many fields thus threatening to seriously impair the yield. About 60 Navajo Indians were brought in from Arizona. Their lack of experience in beets made them willing to take over the more difficult fields. Everyone who employed the Navajos was high in his praise of their work. Several said that the farmers had been unfair to them in not paying them more in the poor fields. They fear that the Navajos will report that they cannot make enough to justify the trip. Moreover, while they promised to return for topping, a number of them took work with the construction projects and it is feared they will not return at the lower salary. However, the farmers were very pleased with the Navajos, and there will be no reluctance to employing them in even larger numbers.

In the beet, alfalfa, and general farm work, boys have been extensively employed. They have been paid about the same wages as men, 30 to 40 cents an hour. The attitude toward them varies somewhat with the experience of the individuals, but this variation is against a general attitude that they are not desirable help. There is a general feeling that they should not receive as high wages as men. When it is suggested that if they did equal work they should have equal pay, the farmers reply that they require more supervision because of their experience. Several have said that they are as good as a man if you work with them, but they can't take the time to stay and watch them. Several farmers criticized others for hiring boys at high wages.

Farmers are reluctant to train boys or other inexperienced help and maintain that they cannot take the time to do so. They point out that the small operator who hires only one or two laborers must be at another job himself and so cannot supervise and train. They also maintain that nonfarm boys cannot be trusted with horses and expensive machinery.





The use of nonfarm women for farm labor has not been considered seriously yet. One was reported by several farmers to be working the hay field. Several were employed to pull onions. There was a division of opinion concerning the ability of women to do farm work. Most conceded that they could do some things, like pull onions and possibly hoe beets. They generally believed that "colored" women could do it but that "white" women are not strong enough. When the interviewer suggested that white women should be able to top beets, he was usually asked if he had ever done it.

Generally, hand work with beets is considered beneath the dignity of "whites". It is recognized as hard work, but not especially valuable. Several beet growers were asked if they thought beets a desirable crop. All did and several were as enthusiastic as one who said, "They are the nicest crop we raise. I'd like to raise nothing else". But, the same ones, when the interviewer mentioned the hand work involved, indicated vigorously that they themselves wouldn't do the hand labor for any amount. It is very rare that the operator's family will work in beets. The majority believe that women are physically incapable of running a tractor. When they were reminded that our enemies were using female labor in almost all farm jobs and that if our people were not physically able to do the same, we might lose the war, they were still convinced that "Our women are just not strong enough".

On the other hand, some farm women have worked in the fields this year, especially in haying. One farmer mentioned that during the haying season his wife had run the pickup which was used to stack the hay. He also remembers that during the last war his wife and other women had done heavy work. Several insisted that women are just not made for heavy work. "They are not strong like they used to be. My daughter insisted on running a tractor and I paid for it in doctor bills."

Whenever the need for some unusual practice because of the war was discussed, the interviewer was impressed by the feeling of unreality concerning the war. So far it has made little impression on the ways of the community. It is considered bad and unfortunate. The people hate to see their boys drafted but in general consider that it can be taken in their stride. The attitude cannot even be called optimism. Rather, the war is rather unreal, as will be pointed out in more detail later. Shortages are not believed to be very real, most of them find their sugar ration adequate and believe there is plenty anyway. The rubber problem will be solved in time to provide plenty of tires when the present ones are worn out. Difficulty in getting repairs for machinery is more due to tape than to shortage of materials, labor and manufacturing facilities. Even the shortage of labor is more due to their inability to meet the high wages of the Government projects than to a real labor shortage.

It is not so much that they are unwilling to change their ways of life as it is to the fact that they cannot imagine a different way of life. To them, farmers just can't produce without trucks, machinery, and labor. "They will just have





to give them to us". Very few can conceive of the possibility of losing the war. Perhaps morale is too high. When new ways of doing things, such as the use of woman labor, severely restricting the use of trucks, staggering planting in order to lengthen harvest seasons, and getting along without new machinery, they simply smile tolerantly and say, "It can't be done. It's some Easterner's idea that sounds good on paper, but it can't be done".

The sugar beet company is attempting to partly solve the labor shortage by beginning beet harvest about ten days early. The farmers who were asked to start early harvest objected strenuously.

Twenty-eight people were requested to attend the meeting called for evolving truck and tire conservation, but only five attended and one of them had not been invited.

There is considerable rumor about a black market in tires but no one was encountered who admitted actually securing tires in that manner, although several told how they had been told they could buy them. The general attitude was one of slight reprimand and wonder "if they should report it or buy tires".

There is little change in the use of tires on trucks and passenger cars. The interviewer mentioned to all of the farmers interviewed that it had been tedious to drive four hundred miles at 40 miles per hour. All agreed that it certainly must be. In general, they seemed to consider such slow driving as commendatory but said that they hadn't slowed down--when they went anywhere they were always in a hurry. A couple slyly suggested, in effect, that Government employees had plenty of time to waste on the road but that they didn't.

Since a Japanese concentration camp is to be located about 60 miles away, all were questioned on the possible use of Japanese labor. The pat answer in all cases was that they would like to work then with a pitchfork behind them, "I'd work 'em". But, when pushed, they all admitted that they would have no objection to having them and several inquired if the interviewer knew how they might go about getting a family.

There are a few Japanese operators in the county. In the past they have been rather highly regarded, but rumors are beginning to circulate and hard feelings toward them are developing. Two stories circulating are that certain "service men" have refused to let them in their business establishments or wait on them, and that the day after Pearl Harbor a child of one of the families went to the post office to mail a package to Japan and insured it for a fabulous figure of four digits. One farmer had been approached by a Jap onion grower to rent his farm for storage of onions. Another farmer said, "I'd charge him plenty. He is going to have a hard time getting anyone to rent him space". But, when told what the Jap offered, he said it was a good price and didn't recommend "soaking him anymore". It should be noted that the most severe censor and rumor teller was a man whose neighbors criticize him for getting his boy deferred.





Two moderately large operators maintained that they had no trouble getting farm labor. Both these men insisted that the machinery and repair shortage was more severe than the labor shortage. Both were bitter at the "red tape" and delay in getting repairs. They both repeated long stories of their efforts to get vital repairs. According to the stories, they started their efforts at least six months before they needed them, were referred from one office to another, finally got a priority number, and then found they couldn't get the part. A sidelight is that while both maintained they had to have the repairs to harvest their crop, they didn't get them but did harvest their crop.

Owners of machinery indicated their intention to save their machinery for themselves and not do custom work. "If I break down", they say, "I may not be able to get it repaired, then where would I be?"

Some claimed that pooling of machinery is not practical because the owners did not have time to run it for a neighbor and they couldn't trust it to someone else. They all pointed out that machinery is an expensive item and with parts so difficult to get they were unwilling to subject it to possible poor treatment.

In general, there is a friendly attitude toward the USES. There is a local office in the county seat town and farmers come in and call continuously for help. The laborers promptly report there for work and during the hours the writer was in the office, ten boys were employed by farmers who came in. It was reported that the Bent County office served the farmers much better than the ones in adjacent towns.

The farmers claim that the effect of the labor shortage will be felt more next year and predict that many farms will not be operated. As pointed out in the first section, the farms have increased and decreased in size during the history of the valley. This is due to the fact that the land is chiefly owned in 80- or 160-acre tracts, and there is a high proportion of tenancy. These in combination afford an opportunity for flexibility in size of operational units. Many of the present operators of more than 80 or 160 acres have more than one landlord and most owners rent additional land. Practically all the farmers interviewed say that labor is so scarce and uncertain that next year they are going to protect themselves to such an extent that they can operate their land themselves. However, only a few admitted that they had actually notified a landlord that they didn't intend to farm his land next year. However, it was reported that several land owners had sought to rent their land to farmers with poorer reputations--farmers they would not have considered renting to before.

When it was pointed out to some of the farmers that they were actually keeping their crops in pretty good shape so far, they insisted that it would be worse next year. More significant, they almost all indicated that the continual mental strain and worry over getting labor was unbearable. "We never know from one day to the next if we will get help or lose our crop. If we farm what we ourselves can handle, we may not make so much but will know where we stand."





A few farmers said that the land would all be farmed but that the labor shortage would be reflected in a reduction of high labor requirement crops such as beets, and in a reduction of livestock. They maintained that a family could operate considerable land in corn, small grain and alfalfa, but couldn't then do a lot of chores necessary if they had livestock--this would, they said, especially affect milk production. So, a man would sell his livestock.

Some of the older farmers said that with machinery and livestock selling at such high prices, this would be a good time to quit farming and work a little as hired hands, "Let the other fellow do the worrying".

